

The art of management is apt to take many forms. From a laid-back, laissez-faire approach, to the hard-ass doctrinaire, management techniques can be as diverse as the personalities who actually do the managing. This can be good or bad. Mostly good, I think; because it doesn't lock you into any style. Different kinds of people need, and respond to, different kinds of management. As a manager, a good manager, you need to find the styles that fit and use them on the right people, at the right times. Easier said than done, especially when the style a certain person responds best to is not really "your style." A successful manager needs to be observant, able to decipher those clues as to which style to use at what time. They need to be flexible, able to change styles from one individual and/or situation to the next. But a good manager still needs to ensure that all people are treated fairly and equitably, despite the particular style of management being used.

Since most people have a sense of humor, I find that using humor can be a strong management asset. Actually, no one management style works on everyone, but I've found that humor and fun work on most people. So I use it. Psychiatrists and consultants have said that organizations that have fun at work and that "play" are more creative and have less stress. The following story is true. It illustrates the art of managing in the fun mode, but also illustrates several important management principles in the process.

One of my most challenging management experiences occurred when I was the manager of the Tactical Systems Unit at McClellan AFB. My shop was trying to accelerate the repair and delivery of a communications system to one of our overseas units. In order to expedite the repair I assigned more people to the project and went to a three shift, around-the-clock operation. **(MANAGEMENT RULE 1: Look at ways to utilize and maximize your resources, in this case manpower).** This three shift operation did yield some results, our progress increased, but it also imposed some hardships on some of the workers. They were all feeling the pressure of trying to meet a customer's accelerated deadline. **(MANAGEMENT RULE 2: Be aware of the impact of your decisions and watch for signs of trouble).** In order to keep up morale, maintain the team's focus and demonstrate that I supported their efforts, I decided to take some unusual actions. **(MANAGEMENT RULE 3: Don't be afraid to make a decision and take action).**

On the chosen evening I began to gather my materials. In a cardboard box I placed three candles, four cups, a 12" x 8" piece of plywood, a compass, a bag of cookies, four baseball caps, a quart of milk and a small hatchet. Although my wife viewed my activities with a quizzical eye she was reluctant to ask too many questions about my intentions. At 8:00 p.m. I kissed her good-bye and left for the shop.

By 8:30 p.m. I had arrived at work and entered the building. There were only three people working the swing shift but three was just right for the ritual (it has something to do with numerology and cosmic vibrations). The crew was a bit startled to see me, but since I had the habit of sometimes showing up unannounced they were not too surprised. I asked the crew chief, Alan, to go and get the rubber chicken out of my office. **(MANAGEMENT RULE 4: Always keep a rubber chicken in your office).**

When Alan returned I explained my purpose. I told them, “Men, I have powers that other supervisors do not possess. I have, until now, hesitated to use them. At this time, given the critical need of this system in USAFE, and the problems we are experiencing, I have decided to invoke these formidable powers.” I think they were impressed. **(MANAGEMENT RULE 5: Keep your people informed, share information and plans whenever possible).**

I took the plywood from my box, and using the compass, precisely aligned the long axis of the wood due north. I placed the rubber chicken on the wood; face down, beak north. **(MANAGEMENT RULE 6: It is not enough to just have a plan, you also need a direction in which to proceed, a goal).**

I asked the guys if they had baseball caps (the ritual is not quite as effective without baseball caps). They said “No”; they had no baseball caps. I reached into my box and pulled out baseball caps for all of us. **(MANAGEMENT RULE 7: Make sure your people have the tools they need to do the job).**

Using my compass as a guide I positioned each person equidistant around the chicken while I stood at the chicken’s head. A lighted candle was placed in front of each person. I told them they would have to chant the name of the Great Spirit while I exhorted the spirit to imbue us with his powers. I asked them if they knew the name of the Great Spirit.

“Rubber chicken?” they asked.

“No”, I replied. The name of the Great Spirit, I told them, was Kareem Abdul Jabbar.

In unison they began to chant the name of the Great Spirit. “Kareem Abdul Jabbar, Kareem Abdul Jabbar, Kareem Abdul Jabbar.” **(MANAGEMENT RULE 8: Endeavor to get people to work together; a group commitment, shared ownership and involvement are vital).** As they chanted the Great Spirit’s name I lifted my voice to the heavens (actually the metal roof of the building). In the still of the night my prayers resonated throughout the empty building.

“Oh Great Spirit, we call upon you to give us your power, give us your wisdom; cast these electronic demons from this system, purge this system of its evil manifestations.”

I quickly reached into the box, took out the hatchet, and, with a blood-curdling scream, neatly separated the chicken’s head from its body with one clean stroke. The chanting stopped. I had their attention.

I gave the chicken’s head to one of them and told him to place it underneath the system that was giving us all the problems. I asked another to hang the now headless chicken body inside the system, near the operator console. With these tasks completed I told them it was time to consecrate the sacrifice. Once again I went to my box and took out the cups, milk, and cookies. As we enjoyed our milk and cookies I told them that if they believed, really believed, that they would soon resolve many of the problems they had been encountering. **(MANAGEMENT RULE 9: Take time out to talk to your people, let them know that you care, that you are involved, that you support their efforts).** My metaphysical experiment successfully concluded, I quickly packed my box and left. The entire process had taken less than 15 minutes.

What did it prove? As managers we need to do more than just sit in our office, tell people what to do and go home. We need to be out there, show the people we’re behind them, get involved, provide them with resources, motivation, and guidance. **(MANAGEMENT RULE 10: Be active, be involved; but avoid micro-managing. Give your people the tools, resources, and direction they need and then get out of their way).**

Did it work? Although we still had the deadline some of the tension was gone. The guys realized that management was doing “everything” it could to help them. They had been part of something special and unique. Unfortunately, we still had some more problems with the system

(I think Chuck must have been a non-believer). We ultimately met our schedule, the customer was satisfied, but I was minus one rubber chicken

A few days after the ritual my second level supervisor, a Major, came down to the shop to look at the system. **(MANAGEMENT RULE 11: Upper management support and concern are important and should be more than lip service)**. I showed her through the system and explained some of the problems we were having and how we were resolving them. She looked long and hard at that headless rubber chicken hanging from the shelter ceiling but never asked me about it. It's probably just as well, I'm not sure I could have explained it.

Greg Causey

(The above is from the unpublished book Rubber Chicken Voodoo Management: Using Humor and Aberrant Behavior to Effectively Lead People, written by Greg Causey)

MANAGEMENT BLUES

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**MANAGEMENT AND QUALITY CAN MAKE YOU CRAZY
YOU GOTTA WORK HARD, YOU CAN'T BE LAZY
SOMETIMES YOU GOTTA TRY EVERY TRICK IN THE BOOK**

**BUT IT'S REAL SIMPLE, AIN'T COMPLICATED
MANAGEMENT SCIENCE TO ME IS OVERRATED
THERE'S A LOT OF PLACES FOR HELP THAT YOU CAN LOOK**

**I'M GONNA TELL YOU A LITTLE STORY TODAY
'BOUT HOW I MANAGE THINGS MY WAY
IT'S A LITTLE OFF-BEAT AND MAY SOUND A LITTLE STRANGE
BUT SOMETIMES IT'S GOOD TO HAVE A CHANGE**

**SO SIT BACK AND RELAX, HEAR WHAT I SAY
LISTEN TO THE STORY I TELL YOU TODAY
IT'S A LITTLE WEIRD, BUT IT HAS A MESSAGE TOO**

**I WON'T SAY IT'S RIGHT, OR SAY IT'S WRONG
BUT WHEN I'M AT WORK I LIKE TO HAVE FUN
AND MAYBE YOU CAN FIND THAT, IT WORKS FOR YOU TOO
AND MAYBE YOU CAN FIND THAT, IT WORKS FOR YOU TOO**

RUBBER CHICKEN VODOO MANAGEMENT

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YOU SEE IT IN MOVIES, ON TV AND IN A BOOK

MANAGEMENT AND QUALITY ARE EVERYWHERE YOU LOOK

KEEP YOUR EYES OPEN AND YOU CAN LEARN A THING OR TWO

FROM DEMING TO SHAKESPEARE THE LIST IS LONG

YOU CAN EVEN LEARN SOMETHING FROM DON CORLEONE

AND WHEN YOU HAVE A PROBLEM YOU WILL KNOW JUST WHAT TO DO

BUILD YOUR CONFIDENCE AND GET SELF-RELIANCE

LEARN ABOUT MANAGEMENT, IT AIN'T ROCKET SCIENCE

DON'T BE SCARED PUT AWAY YOUR FEARS

THIS STUFF AIN'T NEW, IT'S BEEN AROUND FOR YEARS

PLAN YOUR WORK AND WORK YOUR PLAN

COMMUNICATE WITH FOLKS WHENEVER YOU CAN

GIVE 'EM THE TOOLS AND TRAINING THAT THEY NEED

GET EVERYONE INVOLVED, 'CAUSE MORE IS BETTER

TRY TO BUILD A TEAM BUT STILL BE THE LEADER

IF YOU DO ALL THAT YOU CAN'T HELP BUT SUCCEED

AND SO TODAY BEFORE YOU WALK AWAY

REMEMBER THE ADVICE I GAVE YOU TODAY

WHEN THE STRESS STARTS TO BUILD AND YOUR PULSE STARTS TO QUICKEN

REACH UP ON THAT WALL AND GRAB YOUR RUBBER CHICKEN